

The Thing In Your Brain That Holds You Back

On Sunday, we continued our sermon series called “Mastering Your Mind” by looking at the concept of “negative strongholds of the mind.”

1. Before we dig in, first a warm up question: Tell us about something you really enjoyed during your Christmas and New Year holidays this year.
2. Jeff began Sunday’s sermon by illustrating how our brains often seem to “cause” us to do stuff without requiring any conscious direction on our part. Jeff told about a time he encountered a snake in a barn and instinctively tried to kill the snake with a shovel. A few days later, a friend who loves snakes found the wounded snake and was outraged. Looking back, Jeff found himself wondering, “What was I thinking?” Tell us about a time in your life when you’ve looked back and wondered, “What was I thinking?”
3. In Matthew 8:13, Jesus says, “It shall be done for you as you have believed.” Jeff used the example of George Dantzig to illustrate the principle. As a grad student, George solved two “unsolvable” mathematical statistical problems, mistakenly thinking they were homework problems, because he missed the part of class where the professor told everyone that the problems were unsolvable.
 - a. When in your life have you been unable to accomplish something because you believed you couldn’t? When in your life have you been able to accomplish something hard because you believed you could?
 - b. From experiences like this, Jeff drew a conclusion: “The quality of my life will ultimately turn, not on the ups and downs of circumstances, but on how my mind interprets and reacts to those circumstances.” Do you agree with that statement? Why or why not?
4. Read John 8:1-11. Often times in life we embrace negative belief statements that entrap us. On Sunday, we looked at the story of John 8 through that lens.
 - a. What negative beliefs might have led the woman in this story into the trap of adultery? Do you think she was consciously aware of these beliefs?
 - b. What negative beliefs seemed to be entrapping the woman’s accusers? Do you think they were consciously aware of these beliefs?
 - c. What powerful positive belief statements were embodied in Jesus’ words and actions in this story?
5. One of Joyce Meyer’s best-selling books is entitled “Battlefield of the Mind.” There she invites us to picture ourselves in a battle for control over our minds. Arrayed against us, she says, are the forces of Satan, personified evil, determined to fill our

brains with lies and deceptions that will cause us to descend into dysfunction. She cites verses like, Ephesians 6:12, “Our struggle is not against enemies of flesh and blood, but against . . . the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places.”

- a. Do you ever feel like a war is taking place in your brain? If so, how does that feel? What’s at stake in the war?
 - b. Some Christians see Satan and demons as metaphors for the sophisticated way evil works in the world, while others see them as literal. Jeff suggested that picturing evil in a lively personified form (whether literal or metaphor) may actually help us better appreciate the nature of the challenges we face. He used the example of a golfer who knows something bad could randomly happen while she’s on the golf course to one who has been told that an actual enemy is looking for a chance to do her harm. The second golfer would proceed with a much higher state of awareness. In your view, is it helpful to live with the idea that “there’s an enemy out there who’s trying to ‘get in my head’ and trip me up?”
6. Read II Corinthians 10:1-5. In this passage, Paul is talking about his critics in Corinth and his confidence that God would give him the victory. In the course of these verses, Paul speaks of “destroying strongholds,” which he associates with false arguments and thoughts. From this, Joyce Meyer draws the concept that God wants to give all of us the spiritual power to destroy false arguments and thoughts that might adversely affect our own minds. She calls these false thought patterns “strongholds of the mind.” Jeff defined these “strongholds” as recurring negative thought patterns that become so strong, they keep undermining us and are virtually impregnable. He pointed out how this “stronghold” concept coincides with the physiology of the brain, which adapts itself to support recurring thought patterns. With all this in mind, Jeff encouraged each of us to try to identify one or two key “strongholds of the mind” that may be holding us back in our lives. Take some time to go around the circle and allow all who wish to respond to the following questions:
- a. For you personally, what might be your most negative “stronghold of the mind?”
 - b. Where do you think that stronghold got its start in your life? Why do you think it has so much power over you?
 - c. How do you see that stronghold affecting you? How does it hold you back?
 - d. Do you ever try to counteract it? What happens?
 - e. What might your life look like if that stronghold were destroyed and replaced with its positive opposite?

This coming Sunday, we’ll talk about steps for destroying negative strongholds and replacing them with their positive opposite.